

# CAMP ADMINISTRATION 101

## SWIMMING TIPS AT CAMP



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Campers swimming and doing water activities with their friends can be the highlight of the summer. However, swimming is also very dangerous and should be taken extremely serious. It only takes a few seconds of complacency for a major incident to occur.

One of the most important aspects of ensuring you always have successful swim days is to thoroughly and properly train staff. Here is some pre-camp training that should be done to prepare for swim trips and activities:

- 1. Certify all counselors in CPR and basic first aid.** They do not all have to be certified lifeguards (unless they also act as your lifeguards at your pool), but should be trained in CPR and first aid. Make it a requirement of the job that staff must know how to swim and be comfortable in the water.
- 2. Teach all your concepts and procedures for supervision and apply them in the water setting.** Things like spreading out, not turning your back to the kids, engaging with kids in and around the water, etc. are extremely important when around the water.
- 3. Make it a requirement that all staff is in and around the water during swim activities.** Staff sitting off to the side or sitting around out of view of the kids is unacceptable.



## Here are some tips to ensure your swim time is always a success:

- 1. Never swim anywhere without certified lifeguards.** You don't want to put more liability on your camp by swimming in areas that are not guarded.
- 2. Counselors should always be actively supervising** in the water or on the banks in view of the kids. Hanging out at a picnic table or laying out in the sun while your kids swim is unacceptable. Even with lifeguards on duty, counselors need to be active in the water with the kids.
- 3. Swim test every child before allowing them to get in the water.** Use a system like wrist banding kids to identify their swim level or if they cannot swim at all. Provide alternative activities for non swimmers and make sure they are away from the water at all times.
- 4. Always review swim rules with the campers** before getting in the water and hold them accountable if they misbehave. Use the buddy system to have campers keep tabs on each other in and around the water.
- 5. Always try to swim in areas where there is high visibility** in the water such as a pool, spring, or clear lake. If you cannot see the bottom, keep swimming confined to shallow water.
- 6. Do not allow horseplay in or around the water.** Kids shouldn't be touching each other in the water, hanging on each other or counselors, jumping in shallow water, running on the pool deck, etc.
- 7. Avoid crowded swim areas.** The more campers and non campers that are mixed together in high density swim areas will exponentially increase the chances of an incident. Try to swim in areas with just your camp group when possible. Anytime you can avoid mixing your camp in with the general public, the better your experience will be and the easier it will be to manage.
- 8. Don't go on beach trips, even when lifeguards are on duty.** Swimming at the beach in the ocean, intercoastal waterway, or large lake brings on many more dangers that are out of your control. Things like current, waves, water depth, water clarity, sea life, and the sheer size of the swim area make it way more likely an incident may occur.
- 9. Run coordinated activities in the water when possible,** but keep them in shallow areas. Games like Sharks and Minnows, Marco Polo, and Relay Races are great ways to keep the kids engaged and in a manageable area to supervise.
- 10. If on a canoe or tube trip life jackets are mandatory.** Only older campers that are strong swimmers should be allowed in those activities. All campers should stick together in close view of staff. This is only recommended if on your property, preferably in a lake close to shore as offsite canoe runs can be too unpredictable.

Have an emergency action plan in place in case an incident does occur. If your staff is well trained to be equipped for swimming at camp and takes swimming seriously you will have a fun, engaging, and incident free experience while swimming at camp.



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